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UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS: REPORT FOR 1993-1994 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET FOR 1995

PART III. EUROPE

Section 15 - United Kingdom

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

GE.94-02807

III.15 UNITED KINGDOM

Country Overview

Characteristics of the refugee population

1. At 31 December 1993, the total number of refugees registered in the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1993 stood at 43,200 persons. This figure includes some 23,500 South-East Asian refugees who were accepted for settlement. The refugees are primarily of urban background with an average age of between 25 to 35. In addition, during the same period, a further 59,000 were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) in the United Kingdom. ELR, is granted by the Home Secretary on a discretionary basis and allows applicants to remain in the United Kingdom on humanitarian grounds. Of the 23,500 applicants in 1993, 6.8 per cent were granted ELR status, with the majority originating from Somalia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Uganda.

2. In 1993, 22,370 persons applied for asylum, representing a decline in applications compared to 1992 (24,600). The majority of asylum-seekers came from Sri Lanka (1,950), followed closely by the former Yugoslavia, Ghana, Nigeria, Turkey and Sierra Leone.

3. The Home Office issued some 23,500 decisions in 1993, leaving a year-end backlog of 45,800 applications pending a decision. Asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia comprise 6,570 of this backlog.

Major developments (1993 and first quarter 1994)

4. In July 1993, the new Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act was introduced, enabling asylum seekers to appeal against a rejection of their claim.

5. The Government has increasingly been resorting to a policy of "third country removals" which means that an asylum request from an individual for whom the United Kingdom was not the first country of entry is not assessed substantively on its merits, on the grounds that the application should have been lodged in the first country through which the asylum-seeker transited. During 1993, about 745 cases were refused on these grounds.

6. In response to the High Commissioner's appeal, 947 individuals from the former Yugoslavia were granted temporary protection, initially for six months, outside the United Kingdom Immigration rules and with a right to apply for asylum. The United Kingdom has so far allowed 1,113 persons to remain under the quota scheme of 1,000 persons plus their dependants. In addition, the Government accepted 37 medical evacuees and their dependants from Sarajevo. Some of these patients (in particular mothers who had accompanied their children) have requested assistance to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

7. A total of 1,586 persons were accepted for resettlement in the United Kingdom in 1993, outside of the quota for persons fleeing Bosnia and Herzegovina. This figure includes a number of vulnerable and at-risk cases. As in previous years, the majority of these cases had close family links. A total of 539 Vietnamese arrived in the United Kingdom from Hong Kong during 1993 under the "2000 Programme" which was agreed to under the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees. The Government announced the cut-off date for arrivals under the Programme to be the end of November 1993, bringing the number of individuals arriving by that date to 1,965. A residual caseload still exists in Hong Kong, consisting of those who were processed for the United Kingdom but who did not travel by the specified date, and are awaiting the outcome of further negotiations between UNHCR and the United Kingdom.

Programme objectives and priorities

8. The overall objective of UNHCR in the United Kingdom is to enhance its relations with all government bodies dealing with asylum-seekers and refugees, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and refugee interest groups, in order to promote protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom and worldwide.

9. The programme implemented at present in the United Kingdom continues to focus on providing legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as resettlement, family reunification and repatriation assistance to individual cases. The Branch Office no longer directly implements these programmes as of mid-1994, but will continue to promote such opportunities for refugees and asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom.

10. In 1994 and 1995, UNHCR will continue to monitor the implementation of the 1951 Convention. In addition, the provision of temporary protection will be promoted, particularly for persons from the former Yugoslavia who have arrived spontaneously and who do not benefit from the status granted to those who arrive under the United Kingdom quota.

11. Training will form an integral part of the Branch Office's strategy in the areas of protection, implementation of programmes and public information.

Arrangements for implementation/related inputs

12. The Branch Office in London relies primarily on the Refugee Legal Centre (RLC) for providing legal advice and undertaking advocacy on behalf of asylum-seekers. UNHCR's contribution to the RLC covers a nominal amount of 15 per cent of the overall requirements, the remainder of which (85 per cent) is provided by the Government.

13. The British Red Cross Society (BRCS) implements the family reunification programme previously carried out by the Branch Office in London. A project administered by headquarters under the Overall Allocation for resettlement covers travel costs for resettlement and family reunification. In 1993, applications from individuals for travel assistance continued to be processed by the BRCS and

forwarded to the Branch Office for finalizing arrangements with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It is planned that all processing activities will be fully absorbed by the BRCS during 1994.

14. While the responsibility for processing the voluntary repatriation caseload rested with the Branch Office during 1993, the workload associated with the voluntary repatriation project will be transferred to the London office of IOM in mid-1994. IOM London has played a significant role in organizing transport for repatriants and has played an increasingly important part in coordinating transport for individuals from the former Yugoslavia who are accepted for temporary protection.

General Programmes

Variations in planned activities in 1993

15. A project agreement was entered into between the BRCS and the Branch Office in 1993 for family reunification cases. On 5 July 1993, the BRCS became fully operational and, by the end of the year, had processed 199 cases involving 584 individuals. The majority of these cases involved dependants of Somali refugees who were granted visas to travel to the United Kingdom. These activities which involve direct access by the BRCS to UNHCR offices abroad, are planned to continue in 1994 and 1995.

16. The allocation of funds for voluntary repatriation was increased during 1993 due to an increase in the number of requests. At the end of 1993, 60 cases, involving 124 individuals, had been assisted under the project.

1994 planned implementation

17. A decision by the Appellate authorities to list and hear appeals in other parts of the United Kingdom will require a reassessment of financial requirements for the RLC for the remainder of 1994 and 1995, as their services will have to be expanded to cover the whole country.

18. The 1994 contribution to the BRCS to provide counselling and financial assistance to refugees when seeking family reunification reflects a five per cent increase from 1993 in line with estimated local inflation rates.

19. The Branch Office aims to devolve the voluntary repatriation casework to the IOM London Office during June 1994. The programme, which will be centralized at UNHCR Headquarters, will have provisions for a part-time caseworker for interviewing *bona fide* refugees and processing applications. Special attention will be paid to women with no other means of support, unaccompanied minors, as well as medical and other vulnerable cases.

1995 programme proposals

Voluntary Repatriation

20. As in 1994, the proposed initial allocation for 1995 takes into account an increased number of beneficiaries to reflect the number of South Africans expected to repatriate, a programme previously funded under the Overall Allocation for repatriation administered by UNHCR Headquarters. As in the past, this project will cover the transport costs of the refugees from the United Kingdom to their country of origin and eventual place of residence. As part of the devolution of the voluntary repatriation project, an agreement will be drawn up between IOM and UNHCR Geneva and the project will then be administered by UNHCR Headquarters.

21. It is anticipated that the requirements for 1995 will be higher than 1994 as a possible peace settlement in the former Yugoslavia may have considerable impact on the programme.

Local settlement

22. UNHCR's contribution to the BRCS in 1995 are expected to remain the same, with a 5 per cent increase to cover inflation costs. It was agreed between the Branch Office and the BRCS that, after an initial two year period, alternative sources of funding for family reunification would be sought. UNHCR will therefore maximize its efforts during 1995 to assist the BRCS to achieve this objective.

23. As in 1994, a UNHCR contribution to the RLC for legal representation of refugees and asylum-seekers is foreseen for 1995. The introduction in mid-1993 of a right of appeal for all rejected applicants as well as the plans for the RLC to establish centres in other parts of the United Kingdom, might create additional staffing and financial requirements.

Programme Delivery and Administrative Support Costs

Variations in planned activities in 1993

24. The retirement of a Representative, the arrival of his replacement and the rotation of the Deputy Representative in the course of the same year resulted in higher expenditure on staff costs than budgeted. The Home Office's decision to accept over 1,000 Bosnian ex-detainees and their families for resettlement in the United Kingdom required additional temporary local support staff at the Branch Office throughout the year which was covered through funds made available under the Special Operation for former Yugoslavia.

1994 planned implementation

25. The Public Information Officer took up his duties in January 1994, and the post of Refugee Law Training Officer was filled in April 1994. The posts of Associate Resettlement Officer and Senior Resettlement Clerk, which were due to be discontinued as of 30 June 1994, were extended until 30 September 1994 to facilitate the handover of individual casework to an NGO. Because of the crowded

conditions, the Branch Office rented additional premises as of March 1994. As a result the RLC increased its contribution to the Local Settlement Project which enabled UNHCR to cover additional administrative costs related to extra rental expenditures.

1995 programme proposals

26. Salaries and common staff costs are lower due to the discontinuation of the resettlement posts mentioned above. As office conditions are unsatisfactory, the Branch Office is considering a move to new premises. Amounts have been budgeted for Public Information activities and the extension of the post of Refugee Law Training Officer until December 1995.

UNHCR EXPENDITURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

(in thousands of United States dollars)

1993	1994		1995	
AMOUNT OBLIGATED	ALLOCATION APPROVED BY 1993 EXCOM	PROPOSED REVISED ALLOCATION	SOURCE OF FUNDS AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	PROPOSED ALLOCATION/ PROJECTION
GENERAL PROGRAMMES (1)				
150.0	150.0	150.0	VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION	231.3
428.3	466.3	466.3	LOCAL SETTLEMENT	449.0
–	–	925.1	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Annexes I a and II a	913.2
578.3	616.3	1,541.4	SUB-TOTAL OPERATIONS	1,593.5
978.6	792.9	146.3	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT See Annexes I b and II b	60.6
1,556.9	1,409.2	1,687.7	T O T A L (1)	1,654.1
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES (2)				
17.4	–	–	HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO DISPLACED PERSONS FROM THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA	–
–	–	21.6	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Annexes I a and II a	–
17.4	0.0	21.6	T O T A L (2)	0.0
1,574.3	1,409.2	1,709.3	GRAND TOTAL (1+2)	1,654.1